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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KAWC](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: GOTOVINA HUNT BRINGS FAR RIGHT OUT OF THE WOODWORK

REF: A. ZAGREB 173

[1](#)B. 04 ZAGREB 2207

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Ralph Frank for reasons 1.5 (b) & (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: As March 17 looms and pressure to apprehend Gotovina builds, Croatia's small but vocal far right-wing has again found its voice, loudly protesting what it sees as foreign interference in domestic issues. The several recent poster campaigns supporting the fugitive general and renewed anti-ICTY rhetoric help illustrate why the will of PM Ivo Sanader to comply with international demands has not led to Gotovina's arrest.

[1](#)2. (C) While significant, this resurgence of the far right should not be exaggerated. All credible political parties remain solidly focused on reform and EU integration. The real question lies in how the parties will respond to these anti-European attitudes, particularly the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), where right-leaning members feel frustrated with a party that has made huge concessions which the EU has seemingly failed to recognize or reward. A more moderate and rational approach across the political spectrum, such as that advocated by President Mesic, would ensure these isolationist attitudes do not lure in a wider public equally frustrated by the imminent postponement of EU entry talks, now a symbol of Croatia's only future.

[1](#)3. (C) President Stjepan Mesic made the first move in his televised March 10 address to the nation, saying a date is less important than Croatia's lasting commitment to reaching EU standards and ultimately membership. He warned against radical elements who "seek to isolate Croatia for their own political purposes." Similar reactions from major opposition parties would be a welcome step toward calming an agitated public. However, opposition leaders may be unlikely to help the ruling HDZ just two months before hotly contested local elections. Mesic's statement may push them to make their contribution. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

HMMM, WHICH TO GIVE UP ) ANTE OR THE EU?  
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[1](#)3. (U) The "St. Patrick's Day Fever" surrounding the scheduled March 17 start of EU negotiations has confused the Croatian public as they are repeatedly presented in the media with a choice between the fugitive general and the EU. While polls vary in their reliability and tend to oversimplify the issue, the majority of respondents, when asked to choose between "surrendering" Gotovina and starting EU talks, favor protecting the war crimes suspect over guaranteeing the country's European future.

[1](#)4. (U) A recent poll commissioned by the daily newspaper Jutarnji List showed that a majority of HDZ voters oppose efforts to locate and arrest Gotovina, and only a small minority said they would notify the police if they saw him (following Deputy PM Jadranka Kosor's dramatic example in ref A). Regardless of Gotovina, accession to the EU now gets less than a 50-percent support in Croatia. This latest upsurge of Euro-skepticism has provided a soap-box for a number of far right-wing groups.

VETERANS DEFENDING THE HOMELAND DEFENDERS  
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[1](#)5. (U) Veterans' groups, representing several hundred thousand members, top the list of opponents to Gotovina's extradition. Two southern branches of HVIDRA, a leading association for disabled war veterans, gathered on February 25 in the coastal city of Zadar to discuss "the truth about the Homeland War." The event turned into a pro-Gotovina rally. At the same time HVIDRA President and HDZ MP Josip Djakic said that Gotovina should go to The Hague to present his case. The rumble of protests prompted Djakic to later claim that he had meant that ICTY investigators should interview Gotovina in Croatia.

[1](#)6. (C) On March 8, Djakic told PolOff he fears that if

current tensions continue he will have to choose between HVIDRA and the HDZ. Like most veterans, he said he is particularly aggravated by the part of the ICTY indictment that charges Gotovina with engaging in a joint criminal enterprise, "a charge that incriminates the whole nation which only fought for freedom." Djakic told us he believes most veterans' groups will now move farther to the right to support other parties, especially the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP).

17. (U) The Zadar convention prompted other veterans' groups to take a stand. Members of a committee representing 37 war veterans' associations from Dalmatia held their own "truth

and peace" convention in Knin March 12. The group put up a small Gotovina billboard outside a caf, announcing that they were sending "a serious warning to Croatian authorities and particularly to all foreign blackmailers." The committee said that "Only Croats have the right to decide in what direction Croatia will go (and) who they will celebrate as their hero."

18. (U) Likewise, retired colonel Mirko Condic, who used to lead mass protests with HDZ help against the former left-of-center government over its cooperation with the ICTY, announced March 1 that he is pondering formation of a new political party that would include a "military wing" and would "defend the true interests of the Croatian veterans and guard the dignity of the Homeland War." President Mesic discarded this initiative as irrelevant because Condic has been abandoned by the HDZ, his real source of influence. When asked in Parliament on March 9 to comment on Condic's announcement, PM Sanader said his idea was "undemocratic and unacceptable" and his political work "disputable."

#### RIGHT-WING INTELLECTUALS WEIGH IN

19. (U) At a different venue, but in a similar atmosphere, a group of conservative intellectuals convened on February 28 in Zagreb to adopt a "Declaration on the State of Croatian Nation and Culture." This group complained that Croatian culture was dominated by individuals with views "contrary to the Croatian tradition" who "work day and night to destroy the Croatian cultural identity." Similarly, they protested what they viewed as disrespect for the Croatian language and its classics, falsification of Croatian history and attempts to downplay the events and figures that are essential for the survival of the Croatian people. The group includes some fifty academicians, writers, painters, journalists and clerics, some of whom are past or present HDZ members. Their informal leader is Igor Zidic, President of the Matica Hrvatska cultural organization, who warned with characteristic Euro-skepticism about the "slave-like position" of Croatia in the EU, a mere "commercial company" where "big stockholders with colonial appetites dictate terms to the small ones."

#### BELLWETHER PARTY OF RIGHTS STILL LEANING TOWARD THE CENTER

10. (SBU) An encouraging sign that the far right remains in check is the stance of the HSP, which just to the right of the HDZ stands to gain in any shift of the conservative voter base, having already surpassed the centrist Croatian People's Party (HNS) in some polls as the nation's third largest party. According to recently-recruited advisor Mate Granic, former HDZ Deputy PM and Foreign Minister, the HSP continues to re-make its image into that of a modern conservative party "fully based on European values," along the lines of Germany's CDU or the Austrian People's Party. Shunning its black-shirted past, the party is planning a visit for HSP President Anto Djapic to Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, where he will condemn the Ustashe's WWII crimes.

FRANK

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